

Veterans Day Salute

By Congressman Ron Kind

Each November 11th our country comes together to remember our veterans who have served and sacrificed in the name of freedom. The debt owed to America's 25 million veterans, including 475,000 Wisconsin veterans, cannot be repaid. Their sacrifices and those of our military families are freedom's foundation. Indeed, without the brave efforts of all the soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines and their families, our country would not shine so brightly and live so freely.

To salute our veterans and soldiers, I have called for a new "GI Bill of Rights for the 21st Century." Like the original GI Bill of Rights enacted in 1944 to honor the Greatest Generation, this legislation aims to support our next great generation of servicemen and women with improved health care, educational benefits, medical assistance, and job training. The bill also ends the burdensome Disabled Veterans' Tax once and for all and expands military health care (TRICARE) for National Guard/Reservists. Now is the time for us to again fulfill our moral obligation to those who fought for freedom and democracy and pass this bill into law.

We must also continue our efforts to adequately fund veterans' health care. Currently, many veterans must wait weeks, even months, for diagnoses and treatment of serious health problems. These problems will only worsen with the growing numbers of returning service members from Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. In 2006, the Department of Veterans Affairs expects to treat 5.2 million veterans – double the number treated in 1995.

Without question, difficult choices are before the public and Congress with respect to our nation's budget priorities, but I believe we have a sacred pact with all those who served in uniform, and it is our obligation to fulfill the debt owed to them for their brave service. That is why I have routinely fought for full funding for VA health care in the House Budget Committee, and why I am an original cosponsor of the Assured Funding for Veterans Health Care Act of 2005 to guarantee funding for the VA health care system based on the number of veterans it serves and the medical inflation rate for hospitals.

As a great and grateful nation, we must never shirk from *our* duty to care for America's defenders. We owe it to our veterans and troops, and we owe it to those who have died in defense of this nation whose memories we honor best by taking care of their comrades in arms. Let us celebrate, pay tribute and remember these courageous and faithful men and women by passing the GI Bill of Rights, ending once and for all the tax on disabled military retirees, and improving veterans' health care to keep up with our returning soldiers.

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